

New Hampshire
Forest Advisory Board Meeting
January 21, 2022

Present: Patrick Hackley, Charlie Niebling, Jack Bronnenberg, Carol Foss, Jack Savage, Steve Roberge, Mark Zankel, Steve Roberge, Jim Oehler, Tom Thomson, Derek Ibargüen, Mark Ducey.

Absent: Dennis McKenney, John Caveney, David Publicover, Jasen Stock.

Meeting opening

Charlie opens the meeting. Introductions

Review of the agenda. Agenda approved

Director's report

Staffing Update

Patrick gave an update on staffing changes:

Land Management Bureau – The communications coordinator position has been vacant over a year. The position has been updated to better define the job duties. The agency is also developing a relationship with department of safety to provide technical support for communications sites.

Planning & Community Forestry - Elizabeth McKinley was recently hired to fill the Community Forester position. Elizabeth previously worked for Davey Tree and will begin on January 28th.

Forest Management – Administrative Assistant Robin Trombley retired at the end of the year. The position has been filled by Colleen DeAngelis. The bureau also hopes to fill the vacant GIS Specialist position soon.

Forest Protection – Three new Forest Rangers were recently hired. They are all currently in the fire academy. We now have 5 Forest Rangers who been with us less than 2 years. In addition, Captain Doug Miner retired, Part time clerk, JT gone, back. Don Tucker retired and in the market for coordinator.

Nash Stream Forest

Patrick updated the committee on the Revised Southern Connector Trail Proposal, referencing the briefing paper sent to board members earlier today. The connector is desired by ATV users in order to access services. The Tech Team and NS Committee are reviewing the impacts of the original and new proposed connector trail.

Other ATV-related projects on the property include a 2-year field study on Kelsey Notch trail and the West Side trail. Fish and Game is looking at amount of fugitive dust from Westside trail ATV use in Nash Stream and its impact on water quality. They are also looking at the impact of this use on anglers.

Forests and Lands is responding to several Right to Know requests regarding the history of ATV use on the property from Kris Pastoriza. Mark Zankel commented that he recently received a letter from Kris Pastoriza regarding the ATV issue that signed by many individuals in addition to Ms. Pastoriza and noted that it's important to remember that folks like this are often not alone in their interest.

Tom Thomson requested that information regarding meeting agenda topics get sent earlier so that board members have time to review them prior to the meeting.

ARPA Funds

DNCR received \$23.3 million in ARPA funds because of the increased outdoor recreation demand during the COVID pandemic. Most of the funds are for use by the Division of Parks but Forests and Lands will be receiving \$2.2 million for forest fire tower restoration and maintenance. One possibility is restoring the watchman's cabins for use as rentals.

Also, the Division, along with UNH Cooperative Extension, NHTOA, and Charlie Levesque of Innovative Natural Resource Solutions, developed a proposal that focused on NH Forest Products Industry retention and development. The proposal was \$50 million. Ultimately, we were told that this proposal will be wrapped into other workforce initiatives in the state.

The Division is also expecting additional funds from the Forest Service through existing programs. We will be asked to provide input regarding how we would like these program funds allocated in our state. Mark Zankel stated that it would be helpful if FAB is kept in the loop regarding the allocation/use of this additional funding. Patrick agreed to make sure the board is given an opportunity to see/have input on this additional funding. The turn-around is likely to be quick.

Derek Ibargüen asked if anyone from Forest Service, State & Private Forestry has ever been on FAB. There has not, Patrick agreed to reach out to Connie Carpenter to ask if she or someone else from the Durham Field Office would be willing to serve on the Board.

Forest Action Plan Implementation

Now that we've been living with the new Forest Action Plan for a while, the agency would like the board's input identifying implementation priorities. The plan contains 10 focus areas, 42 recommended strategies and 159 associated actions. Given resource constraints, it is important that we identify those things that we should be working on first.

General comments regarding priority setting:

What level should we be prioritizing - focus areas or strategies.

What are some of the filters and criteria that we can all agree with to help us identify implementation priorities?

What are the most pressing needs of the forest? What are the implications?

What items are priorities because they are important, what are priorities because it sequentially makes sense?

Cost, time, what is the impact.

Are there focus areas/strategies actively being pursued by other agencies/organizations. DFL then possibly has supportive role. Some will have partners/champions who are really fired up for whom a little bit of active support by the agency would push the initiative forward.

Jack Savage commented that the level of input being requested today is difficult without having a refresher on the goals/strategies/actions. He added that it's important to look at what can do and what

is critical to do now. He also suggested looking at what the agency is uniquely positioned to implement or advance.

Carol Foss looked at it at the focus area level and was struck by how much integration there is between the focus areas. Many strategies address multiple focus areas.

Specific comments regarding priorities:

Tom Thomson stated that as forest landowner, he goes back to core issues: sustainable forests and maintaining current use. Also, the importance of forest products markets in the maintenance of forests in NH. Without keeping these issues in our sites forest landowners could be in trouble. Specifically, he likes Strategy # 32 which deals with sustainable forest management and open space. Tom also noted that 2023 marks the 50-year anniversary of the Current Use program. He will be reaching out to some people regarding the organization of a recognition program).

Jack Bronnenberg commented that he is frustrated with the lack of energy devoted to developing/attracting low grade wood markets in the state and the inability to obtain any of the ARPA funds to support this work. As a timber harvester he very concerned with the future of this important market.

He added that the ordinary logger is not going to read the plan, not going to know what the state and organizations are doing to address this issue. How can we all continue to manage our lands sustainably without professionals to harvest them? There is a need for better communication to timber harvesters – letting them know what is being done to support markets and sustainable forest management.

Charlie Niebling suggested that board members be sent a survey, asking each to identify 3 focus areas for the division to work on right away, where the agency has clear leadership. Also, identify 3 priority strategies. Board members should consider urgency, sequency, and practicality when identifying priorities. Consideration should also be given to focus areas and strategies that other agencies and organizations are already working on where Forests and Lands can have a significant additive impact.

Susan to send chart pages from the plan that identify interconnections between focus areas and strategies. Susan will also develop and sent the priority identification survey.

DFL newsletter

The Division hasn't had a newsletter since 2011 but we are considering creating one again. We feel that we need to increase our level of communication and outreach. As a start, our required annual report to the legislature will be shared more broadly.

Legislation of Interest

Patrick gave a brief overview of a few of the bills the agency is following.

- HB 1005 relative to creation of a commission on low grade wood and emerging markets. There appears to be a lot of support for this, and we anticipate it passing in the house without issue.

- HB 1579 regarding landowner liability on land authorized for outdoor recreational activities. There was a hearing on this bill yesterday, the Division of Parks is taking the lead on the bill and testified on behalf of the Department.
- There are two bills (HB 1247 & SB 359) requiring the inventory and reporting of state-owned property. They are an effort to identify “inactive” lands. It’s important make sure our lands are recognized as continuing to provide benefits even if not actively managed. We will work with the sponsors to let them know of our process regarding the surplus of lands. Department of Transportation has expressed their concern regarding their ability to complete what is required in the timeframe mandated by this bill.
- HB 1227 – definition of a prime wetland. All speakers in attendance were opposed to expanding the definition of a prime wetlands.

Connecticut Lake Headwaters Forest

Attached to the email sent earlier today, board members received the Memorandum of Agreement between DNCR and Fish & Game for the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Tract. Patrick noted that Appendix A itemizes the agency responsibilities regarding stewardship of the property. Our responsibilities are extensive and often beyond our ability to fulfill. Patrick also stated that the property continues to be for sale, although not actively marketed. Per the terms of the conservation easement, the state has right of first refusal and first offer. Given that the state is already very invested in the property, Patrick asks if this a property that the state should consider owning. He added that the landowner is open to the idea, knowing that they would get no more than appraised value.

Jack Bronnenberg asked about the property tax implications of the state purchasing the property. Susan stated that the state makes payments in lieu of taxes that are approximately the same as if the land were in Current Use and assessed and the mid-range of the “all other” category.

Charlie Niebling asked if the agency would consider owning the fee interest and then entering into a long-term lease for the management of the property. Patrick stated that it would certainly be considered.

Mark Zankel asked what kind of money it would take to purchase the underlying fee interest and also expressed concern about the implications and the potential for undermining the original intent of purchase. Patrick stated he expects it would be between \$200 – \$300 per acre

Mark also asked what the disposition of the easement be. Susan responded that we would need to consult with the AG’s office regarding this. While the easement gives the state right of first refusal and offer it doesn’t address the potential merger of interests or a requirement to transfer the easement to another party should the state acquire the underlying fee interest.

Charlie Niebling asked what board members think the reaction of the towns would be. Jack Savage stated that it might be difficult to get support by the town/county but agreed that it’s important to think big.

Mark Ducey suggested also examining the downside of the property remaining in private ownership. Currently there is cooperative landowner who is easy to work with that but might not always be the case.

Other considerations: If the state purchases the underlying fee and transferred the easement to the Forest Service, could the agency sell the property in the future & how would that work? It could be that it would not be considered prudent to spend \$30,000,000 on the purchase of a property that is already conserved.

Charlie Niebling asked if it would be helpful to form a small group were formed to develop a cost/benefit analysis of the potential purchase of this parcel.

Patrick said that the purchase of the property could help address many stewardship issues and asked folks to think further about this and provide thoughts and comments. He considers the Forest Advisory Board to be a valuable sounding board for this issue.

Roundtable

Jim Oehler – Fish and Game staffing changes: New wildlife chief (Dan Bergeron), new hatcheries managers, a new legislative liaison, and 4 (temporary) wildlife environmental reviewers. F & G will also hire 2 seasonal employees to work on Wildlife Management Areas.

The agency also has a number of timber harvesting operations currently going on and planned.

Steve Roberge – Cooperative Extension personnel changes: Karen Bennett retired, Darrell Covell has returned as program leader, Matt Kelley is the Cheshire County Forester, the vacant Coos County Forester position is currently open for applications.

Upcoming education programs – women owning woodlots & prescribed fire training. They are also working with John Gunn at UNH looking at restoration of forests on private lands

Derek Ibarguen, White Mountain National Forest – They continue to see a lot of recreational use on the forest. Staffing in key positions is stable. They are harvesting approximately 15 million board feet per year. They recently completed a strategic plan and there appears to be a lot of overlap with the FAP.

Jack Bronnenberg – Wood markets are very robust. Difficult for pine mills to get enough logs to operate.

Charlie Niebling – Joined the rarified company of Tom Thomson and became Tree Farmer of the Year for NH.

Tom Thomson – Continues to manage his property as well as being a member of several boards including the Current Use Board. He is constructing a small building for education on the property

Mark Ducey – The Forestry program still alive and well at UNH, including the forest tech program. The Thomson School is working with UNH to elevate role of sawmills in education

Carol Foss, NH Audubon – Phil Brown left to go to the Harris Center. Audubon is hoping to refill his position soon.

Jack Savage, SPNHF – The Belknap range is a land protection focus for the organization. The Rocks Estate will be used as a base of operation to inject energy into the organizations work in the north country. SPNHF is working on the MOU with Division of Parks and Recreation regarding Monadnock (investing more energy and resources). Currently have about 11 timber harvesting operations underway.